

IN THE CLAIMS

Claim 1. (Currently Amended) An information distribution system having a terminal apparatus and an information center, in which a recording medium having recorded thereon unrewritable prepaid information is loadable in the terminal apparatus so as to enable content data to be transmitted to the recording medium from the information center via a predetermined communication line, said terminal apparatus comprising:

first receiving means for receiving said content data transmitted from said information center;

recording and reproducing means for recording said content data received by said first receiving means onto said recording medium loaded by a purchaser in said terminal apparatus and reproducing an identifier unique to said recording medium and said unrewritable prepaid information, wherein said unrewritable prepaid information includes a prepaid amount of money and a prepaid service ID representative of an address of the information center; and

first transmitting means for transmitting said reproduced identifier unique to said recording medium and said reproduced unrewritable prepaid information to said information center;

said information center comprising:

first storage means for storing a plurality of content data;

second transmitting means for transmitting predetermined content data from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus;

second receiving means for receiving said identifier unique to said recording medium and said unrewritable prepaid information transmitted from said terminal apparatus;

second storage means for storing a usable remaining amount of money relative to said unrewritable prepaid information in accordance with said identifier unique to said recording medium and said unrewritable prepaid information received by said second receiving means;

charging processing means for updating, when said predetermined content data are transmitted from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus, said usable remaining amount of money stored in said second storage means for a charge of said predetermined content data transmitted from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus,

wherein the prepaid amount of money included in said unrewritable prepaid information on the recording medium is not updated when said predetermined content data is

transmitted from the first storage means to said terminal apparatus;

first comparing means for comparing said usable remaining amount of money stored in said second storage means with a price of content data to be transmitted to said terminal apparatus;

wherein, when said usable remaining amount of money is found by said first comparing means to be less than said price of said content data to be transmitted to said terminal apparatus, a control signal is transmitted from said information center to said terminal apparatus to instruct said terminal apparatus to prompt for the loading of a second recording medium recording beforehand an identifier unique thereto and prepaid information into said terminal apparatus; and

adding means for adding, when said second recording medium has been loaded in response to the prompt for the loading of said second recording medium, a usable remaining amount of money in said second recording medium to said usable remaining amount of money in the previously loaded recording medium;

wherein said recording medium also records information about a remaining recordable capacity thereof, said information is reproduced by said recording and reproducing means, and said reproduced information is

transmitted by said first transmitting means to said information center;

wherein when after loading of said second recording medium into said terminal apparatus in response to the prompt for the loading of said second recording medium, a result of an addition by said adding means is found in excess of said price of said content data to be transmitted, said identifier unique to said recording medium and said prepaid information stored in said second storage means are edited based on said information about the remaining recordable capacity of said previously loaded recording medium and said information about the remaining recordable capacity of said second recording medium; and

wherein, when said usable remaining amount of money is consumed, the identifier unique to said recording medium stored in the second storage medium is moved to a registration deleted group in the second storage medium to indicate the recording medium has been deleted from registration and is invalid.

Claims 2-16. (canceled)

Claim 17. (currently amended) An information center connected to a terminal apparatus via a predetermined communication line for distributing content data, the

information center comprising:

first storage means for storing a plurality of content data;

transmitting means for transmitting predetermined content data from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus;

receiving means for receiving from said terminal apparatus an identifier unique to a recording medium and unrewritable prepaid information stored in the recording medium which is loaded in said terminal apparatus, wherein said unrewritable prepaid information includes a prepaid amount of money and a prepaid service ID representative of an address of the information center;

second storage means for storing a usable remaining amount of money in accordance with said identifier unique to said recording medium and said unrewritable prepaid information received by said receiving means;

charging processing means for updating, when said predetermined content data are transmitted from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus, said usable remaining amount of money stored in said second storage means for a charge of said predetermined content data transmitted from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus,

wherein the prepaid amount of money included in said

unrewritable prepaid information on the recording medium is not updated when said predetermined content data is transmitted from said first storage means to said terminal apparatus;

first comparing means for comparing said usable remaining amount of money stored in said second storage means with a price of content data to be transmitted to said terminal apparatus;

wherein, when said usable remaining amount of money is found by said first comparing means to be less than said price of said content data to be transmitted, a control signal is transmitted from said information center to said terminal apparatus to instruct said terminal apparatus to prompt for the loading of a second recording medium, having recorded thereon an identifier unique thereto and prepaid information, into said terminal apparatus; and

adding means for adding, when said second recording medium has been loaded in response to the prompt for the loading of said second recording medium, a usable remaining amount of money in said second recording medium to said usable remaining amount of money in the previously loaded recording medium;

wherein, when after loading of said second recording medium into said terminal apparatus in response to the

prompt of the loading of said second recording medium, a result of an addition by said adding means is found to be in excess of said price of said content data to be transmitted, said identifier unique to said recording medium and said prepaid information stored in said second storage means are edited based on said information about the remaining recordable capacity of said previously loaded recording medium and said information about the remaining recordable capacity of said second recording medium; and wherein, when said usable remaining amount of money is consumed, the identifier unique to said recording medium stored in the second storage medium is moved to a registration deleted group in the second storage medium to indicate the recording medium has been deleted from registration and is invalid.

Claims 18-29. (canceled)

Claim 30. (currently amended) An information distribution method for distributing content data from an information center to a recording medium loaded in a terminal apparatus, , said information center and said terminal apparatus being interconnected via a predetermined communication line, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving an identifier unique to said recording medium and unrewritable prepaid information recorded on said recording medium loaded by a purchaser in said terminal apparatus and transmitted from said terminal apparatus, wherein said unrewritable prepaid information includes a prepaid amount of money and a prepaid service ID representative of an address of the information center;

storing in a memory a usable remaining amount of money relative to said unrewritable prepaid information in accordance with said received identifier unique to said recording medium and said received unrewritable prepaid information;

comparing said usable remaining amount of money stored in said memory with a charge of content data to be distributed from said information center to said terminal apparatus; wherein when said usable remaining amount of money is found to be smaller than said price of said content data to be transmitted, a control signal is transmitted from said information center to said terminal apparatus to instruct said terminal apparatus to prompt for the loading of a second recording medium having recorded thereon an identifier unique to said second recording medium and prepaid information;

adding, when said second recording medium has been

loaded in response to the prompt for the loading of said second recording medium, a usable remaining amount of money in said second recording medium to said usable remaining amount of money in the previously loaded recording medium;

permitting, when said usable remaining amount of money stored in said memory is greater than said charge of said content data to be distributed from said information center to said recording medium loaded in said terminal apparatus, the transmission of said content data from said information center to said recording medium loaded in said terminal apparatus; ~~and~~

updating, by said charge of said content data, said usable remaining amount of money stored in ~~a second~~the memory when said content data are transmitted from said information center to said recording medium loaded in said terminal apparatus,

wherein the prepaid amount of money included in said unrewritable prepaid information on said recording medium is not updated when said predetermined content data is transmitted from said information center to said recording medium loaded in said terminal apparatus; and

wherein, when said usable remaining amount of money is consumed, the identifier unique to said recording medium stored in the memory is moved to a registration deleted

group in the memory to indicate the recording medium has
been deleted from registration and is invalid.

Claims 31-40. (canceled)